

## [Mary Cox]

Worker: Adyleen G. Merrick, Tryon, N. C.

Subject: Mary Cox, Tryon, N. C.

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MARY COX

Mary Cox, aged thirty-seven, is old. Lined, stooped, tired. She talks without bitterness.

"Well, it's been hard. I ain't knowed nothin' but work and worry since I can remember. Pa never had no boys, so I've done a man's work from time I used to tote water to field hands to what I'm a-doin' today. I ain't grumblin'. I guess God knows best whichaway our paths oughta lead, but times I got awful weary.

"I don't envy the rich. They has trouble too. But I hate gettin' nowhere. I've heard people say if you've got the wish nothin' can't stop you, but I've [tried?] always and ain't got nowhere yet.

"If you ain't got learnin' you can't got the kinda work that helps you. I never got no education. I always had somebody to look after and no time for nothin' else.

"I was born on a farm in Jackson County six miles from [Sylva?], out beyond Asheville. It was Grandpappy Floyd Cabe's place in Hog Rock district. There wasn't no school and it took hair a day to get to Sylva and back to 'tend meetin'. My Pa was John Cabe. He farmed with Grandpappy and Ma did the woman's work. I don't know when [Sister Katie?] was born. She was six years older'n me and awful pretty. C[??????]

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“Pa and Ma went off somewhere and left us there till I was 'bout six years old, then he went to tenant farm near Grandpappy's. We worked hard and had little. Mornin's I'd get up before good day and lay the kitchen fire before I went to milk. Pa, he fed and tended the stock but Ma and Kate never seemed to take holt much. they was both pleasure-lovin' and always a-wantin' to be traipsin' around goin' to dances and all. It caused a heap of rows. Men came to the house bringin' liquor and carryin' on and before long Pa just couldn't take no more of it so he left out. I stayed on and done the best I could but seemed like after Pa left the work'd shorely kill me.

I tried to plow and plant and make crop. One day, I guess I was awful tired and wore out, but me and Ma and Katie had a awful fuse. I went on to the fields and when night come her and Katie went off with the men that had caused the difference between us, and I ain't seen neither of 'em again to this day.

“Pa, he married again and was a-livin' in Greer, South Carolina. He always was a no talk man and peace-lovin' too. I ain't never blamed him for quittin' Ma, the way she done him.

“Some way he found I was a-livin' alone all by myself and he come after me. We loaded up our all and took it to Greet and I stayed on there. I got a job in the mill after I was sixteen and that's how I come to meet Joe Weaver—he worked in the mill too. He was awful good to look at and we 3 got to goin' together and it just seem like I was a-livin' in another world. I was scared Pa'd find out about Joe so come Sunday I'd slip a poke full of vittles and go off to meet Joe. We'd put a whole day ramblin' though the woods a-lookin' at its wonders and talkin' on like young folks do.

“Somehow Pa's wife Nancy found out abut Me and Joe and seem like she just couldn't stand to see such happiness. She never stopped till she'd brung bad feelin's 'tween me and Joe. And he went away because of it.

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I ain't never seen him since. I been married four times but I ain't loved no other man. seems like I can't, somehow. This man I'm a-living with now keeps pesterin' me to marry him, but I always seem to be waitin' for Joe. Hopin' he'll come back someday.

"After he left I worried so I took sick—it [jus'?] looked like I couldn't make out to live. Pa's mean old wife Nancy kep' a-tryin' all she knowed how to whip me down.

"I remember we was goin' to town one Sad'dy in Pa's old car. Me and another girl was a-settin' in the back with a man and I was a-holdin' Nancy's baby. Her and Pa was up in front, and spite of all Pa could say, Nancy, she had to do the drivin'. We knowed she was liquored up and we was all scared.

"Jus' as we got to [Mostell's?] covered bridge we seen a car comin'. She tried to stop and couldn't, so she pulled over too far to the side the road and we went flyin' down hill and [lit?] in the river.

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"Time we started goin' over Nancy jumped out, and you can believe it or not, when she jumped she took her pint of liquor with her and before we could get safe she took time to bury it.

"We was all scrambled up in the car and a-settin' in water half up to our necks. I made out to save the baby, but after we got out and I was a-lookin' over it, I thought where I seen mud was where its guts had busted. It scared me to death. But the little thing hadn't been hurt a-tall.

"I always will believe Nancy meant to kill us. She was that mean.

"I got tired worryin' with her and it seemed like Pa was gettin' cantank'rous too, so I run off and married a man a heap older'n me to spite 'em. [We?] went to live on Factory Hill. Clyde Bailey was always good to me, but he jus' wasn't no count. I'd give him my money

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to keep so we could save some and all the time he was a-spendin' it [on?] liquor and triflin' women.

I'd had all I aimed to stand of that in 'bout three months. Me a-tryin' to work and save and him a-ramblin' and bein' drunk mos' the time! I quit him. I figgered if I had to do all the work I'd keep all the money and get rid of such trash. He never done me no harm, though.

"Well, towards the end of the year there was a youn'un a-comin'. I cried a heap. Seemed like with all I'd been through I couldn't bear to be hampered with no brat. I was scared, too. I kep' on doin' the best I could, but when my time was drawin' close I took two of the mill girls, Alberta Jones and Frankie 5 Lee, to live with me. [We?] live in one room and slep' in the same bed, but I started feelin' better and we got along right good. I was savin' my wages, \$7 a week, agin the time I'd come down with the brat. The girls paid me board and I lived on that.

"Just before my time come the mill shut down. Lord, I didn't know what to do! Me and the girls set out to look for work but it seemed like everybody was a-doin' the same. We'd strike out come daylight and tramp till night.

"Well, we made out somehow till cotton pickin' time, when we got our chance. I couldn't keep up and had to quit the first day. I used to sit all day and watch the others earnin' eatin' money, and choke back the tears.

"One cold night just before day I birthed my Rubin. Pore little thing, he seemed too little and puny to stay here an I felt sorry I hadn't wanted him when I seen how sweet and helpless he was. I couldn't bear the thoughts of losin' him. From then on I've struggled to keep a home for him and be a good ma. Ruby's nineteen now, most twenty. He's been through high school and's got a job and helps me. He's awful smart. I got good reason to be proud of him.

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"Soon as Ruby was old enough to take from breast milk, Pa found out and we made up, and he come and got him so I could go to work. I got a job as spinner at the [Woodside?] Mills in Greenville at \$9.90 a week. It was awful nice there and the folks was kind. The mill folks hired a preacher so all could learn 6 the word, and we got our food and livin' quarters cheap. There was a doctor and nurse to tend the sick and them high up took a heap of care of the workers. I paid Pa to keep Ruby and used to go Sundays to see him. I hated awful to be away from him. Me and Nancy got along all right 'bout that time, seein's I was payin' for Ruby's keep.

"About then's when I met up with Wade Cox. He was a heap older'n me too. I didn't care much for him, but he just kep' a-talkin' gettin' married till one day I said I would. Come Sad'dy we went to town and [Wade?] bought furniture and pot vessels and all. Then he bought some groceries and by time we'd got to the house he'd rented the furniture had come. It was right much fun settin' things to rights and afterwards gettin' supper.

"Wade says to me when I'd warshed the dishes, 'You go on back where you come from now, Mary, and meet me here tomorrow mornin'. We'll eat breakfast and then I'll go got the preacher to marry us.'

"Well, Wade and me got married that next mornin' and he let me bring Ruby home. [?] I glad to have my baby back again! I used to just set and look at him.

"Wade wouldn't let me work on at the mill. He made good money and wanted I [?] should stay home. But then he got sick. He was ailin' nigh onto three years before he had to quit work. When that time come we had to leave the mill. He went home to his folks and I took Ruby and went to stay at Miss Rosie 7 Fisher's in Dark Corner till I could find work. I don't know what I'da done if she hadn't took us in a while.

"I couldn't get no word from Wade so I went over to Tryon one mornin' and sent him a telegram sayin' 'Sick and no life expected.' I've always been sorry I sent it, because by

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then Wade had been took real sick, and was gone, seem like, before they knowed it. I took what little money we had and me and Ruby went to South Carolina. I put [Wade?] away right good for what little I had to do with.

“Bein' as I was so far from Miss Rosie I thought I'd better look for work 'stead of tryin' to get back there. The mill folks was might kind and give me back my job. I went on night shift form 6 P.M. to 5 A.M. The work was awful hard but I made out to do it. Mr. Tucker, the mill policeman, would go by my house at night and put Ruby to bed and tell him not to be scared, Ma had to work, but just to say hi prayers and go to sleep like a good boy, Ma would be there when he woke up. But Lord, I used to worry.

“When the shut-down come, the mill only kep' old hands. All us others had to go. I sold what few house things I had, piece at a time, and stayed on where we was, hopin' things would get better, till the day come when me and Ruby was a-sleepin' on a pile of straw and cookin' in the fireplace—if there was anything to eat. Afterwhile there wasn't.

Well, I'd always managed to live, somehow or other. I took a bucket and went out blackberryin'. I made me a dollar 8 in two days and more than that the next week. It went on till the berries give out. Still no work.

“When I got down to my last dollar I didn't know what else I could do so I took it and bought a gallon of corn liquor and by night had sold it for nigh on to five dollars. I got rations with some of the money and bought more liquor with the rest. I used to stay seared to death I'd get caught, but I kep' on till I'd got enough ahead so I could take Ruby, and then I lit out for Dark Corner where the liquor was plentiful and I knowed I could either get work or make a livin' sellin' it.

“I knowed it wasn't right. I'd rather done honest work if I coulda got it. But I couldn't stand to hear Ruby cryin' he was so hungry.

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"We went back to Miss Rosie and whilst [?] was there Eb Gilreath come along. You know, I been married four times, but I ain't to say got papers for but two of 'em. When I married Eb I done the worst yet. And be looked so [likely?], too. He stayed drunk all day and I know he's the meanes' was ever lived. I jus' left him.

"After that I married Jake Goslin. [We?] sure did get along good. He was kind o' triflin' but I liked him. He never would give me no papers 'bout our marryin', though. I never thought much about it at the time, but I come to find out he had a livin' wife. So I jus' set his clothes out in the middle o' the road and told him to go back where he come from.

"Ain't I had husband trouble?

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"We went to stay at Mr. Babe Durham's, him bein' a widderman and needin' somebody to take care of his things and all, and he promised to pay me \$2 a week and our keep for stayin' there. I liked it fine. It was real pretty there at the foot of the mountains and Babe lived good and we had plenty to eat.

"Babe's children didn't much like us bein' there, and before long words passed and there was bad feelin's. They'd got off and side-talk about as and say I had to go. To keep peace Babe built a one-room house for me and Ruby to stay in outa this and that as he could find, and we moved there. Babe hadn't give me no money so he let me have a rooster and 'bout a dozen hens so I sold eggs and done real good. Soon I had a little money to spend.

"One day Babe had to go to Spartanburg, so I said I believed I'd go along and get me a permanent with some of my chicken money. Well, we went. Me and Babe and Ruby was a-travellin' home come nightfall, when Babe's children come upon us and blocked the rood. They was mighty mad. [Ola?] and Lloyd, they got as down, Lloyd keepin' his foot on my neck while Ola her shears and cut every inch of hair off my head, down to the scalp, while Archie, the oldest, [helt?] his Pa off with a shotgun. They said they done it because

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Babe hadn't never bought no hair-curlin' for their mammy and from now on I'd better [??] look out . We all had an awful row and Babe kep' sayin' what he'd do tomorrow.

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“Well, next day Babe went to the still and while he was gone somebody set fire to his house. I knowed ours would be the next so I made him move us to Tryon and give him enough things to live in the house he'd built for me and Ruby. Miss Holmes there give me a little hose rent free and sent word to the Helpin' Hand that we was needy. They give us rations and things till I got money from Babe's children for not settin' the law on 'em. I wore a cap till my hair growed out and told folks I'd had a spell of fever, then soon as it growed long enough I went back to Spartanburg and got another permanent from the same lady I'd got the other one from. She let me have it for only a dollar, she felt so sorry for my troubles.

“That year I joined up with the WPA and got work in the sewin' room. I like it fine except that we had to work with nigger women. Some said it was agin the law but we worked with 'em, just the same.

“I never seem to care much for Babe after he let his gang of children do me so bad, but me and Ruby was gettin' along good and Babe wasn't gettin' along good at all in the little one-room thing he'd built for us, so we took him to live with us. Me and Ruby pay the installments on the furniture—\$2.50 a month, and \$8 for rent, and Babe, he pays for rations and extrys. I get \$3.25 a week for cleanin' out the movin' picture [house?] and so we get to see all the pictures free. I just have to sweep and dust and perfumagate the place, the work ain't to say hard no time, and I like seein' all the pictures. [We?] joined 11 up with the Free [Will?] Babtiss and I got a heap of pleasure out of goin' to church. But we don't go no more. Folks got to runnin' on 'bout me and Babe not livin' right nor bein' Christians so I quit a-goin'. I didn't feel like tamperin' with God if I wasn't livin' right, so come Sunday we just set home and listen to the radio and sometimes we get preachin' that away.



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"I can't help wishin' I'd a-had some education so's I could get somewheres. I always did want a business of my own. I know I coulda done well. I hope sometime to get one before I die. And I might. You can't never tell.

"Well, we moved to the new theayter this week and Mr. Charlie's givin' me more pay. So, takin' things by and large, I guess I'm a-doin' all right. But I sure do wish folks'd quit talkin' 'bout me so much."